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SUBJECT: Crackdown on Mala Fide Visa Applicants and Document Brokers  
Results in a String of Arrests

REF: A) SANTO DOMINGO 001235; B) SANTO DOMINGO 000527  
C) SANTO DOMINGO 001606

1) (U) Summary: Santo Domingo's Consular Section recently implemented an active strategy to inhibit visa fixers and document brokers. Working in conjunction with local authorities, post's Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU), the Assistant RSO Investigator (ARSO-I) and a local National Police (PN) officer assigned to the consular section have effected the arrest and successful prosecution of nearly three dozen Dominicans involved in the production and/or use of fraudulent documents. Thorough investigations and increased cooperation with the host country government agencies involved in these operations have resulted in an effective deterrent to criminal activity in consular related fraud. This cable outlines the strategy used by post and provides several examples of its successful implementation. END SUMMARY.

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BACKGROUND  
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2) (SBU) As we discussed in our previous bi-annual consular fraud summaries (ref A and B), the ready availability of fraudulent documents and the energetic efforts of visa-fixers complicate visa adjudication in Santo Domingo. In the past, even when we discovered fraud in a visa or passport application, we held little hope of successfully prosecuting mala fide applicants much less the originators of the fraud. In this environment of high demand and little deterrent, illegal document brokers and visa fixers (known locally as "buscones") have flourished, comfortable with their predictable impunity from police action - until now.

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COOPERATION THE KEY TO SUCCESS  
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3) (U) Our consular section has united a fraud prevention team consisting of the FPU Manager and LES Investigators, the A/RSO-I, and a vetted PN officer assigned to the consular section through the RSO office. The dedicated PN officer, a somewhat unique colleague, has been a tremendous asset, supporting the A/RSO-I and

FPU in a variety of ways. FPU Investigators often benefit from the presence of a local law enforcement officer during questioning. In cases where a subject is found to have violated local laws (for example possessing multiple identity documents) the PN officer gathers necessary evidence and arranges an immediate arrest. He may also transport persons found using fraudulent documents directly to the nearby PN Anti-Fraud Department to make formal complaints against those who provided them with document packages. In several cases his involvement has enabled the arrest of document vendors and/or visa-fixers in meetings set up outside of the consular section.

4) (U) Over the past few months the ARSO-I and dedicated PN officer fostered a positive working relationship with the PN Anti-Fraud Department that has allowed investigations begun in the consular section to be seamlessly transferred to local police for arrests. The pair have developed a similar relationship with a local public prosecutor who is eager to accept our carefully documented, well prepared, "easy win" cases. Several of these arrests have received press coverage and post's fraud prevention strategy includes public outreach efforts which will be reported septel.

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#### THE RESULTS

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5) (SBU) Since November, post's FPU, the A/RSO-I and our dedicated PN officer have coordinated the arrests of 35 individuals involved in fraudulent activities related to U.S. visas and/or passports. These include the arrests of 11 mala fide visa applicants, 20 document vendors and/or visa-fixers, 2 persons with counterfeit visas, and 2 persons with fraudulent (photo-sub) U.S. passports. Although some of these criminals are released in 24 hours pending further investigation, the arrests send a strong message to the public that fraud is not taken lightly and may lead to serious consequences.

6) (SBU) Details concerning some of these arrests follow:

a. On November 3, 2009, a member of the Dominican Chess Federation was arrested after providing a group of NIV applicants with fraudulent letters stating that they were members of the Federation and were going to attend a tournament in Miami. Applicants had agreed to pay amounts up to \$9,000 USD if/when they were issued visas. The document broker was sentenced to three months preventative custody while the case is developed.

b. On November 25, FPU pre-screening of applicants in the NIV waiting area revealed two applicants with suspect documents. During interviews with FPU investigators and the dedicated PN officer, the applicants confessed that their job letters, bank statements and birth certificates were all fraudulent. Both applicants paid the same anonymous vendor \$695 USD for the documents and each were to pay an additional \$6,000 USD after receiving the visas. A middle-man working for the vendor was identified by the two applicants and arrested while waiting outside the consular section. The case is still under investigation by the PN Anti-Fraud Department and the local district attorney's office with the middle-man sentenced to preventive custody.

c. On November 25, the HR Manager of a large computer systems company was arrested and charged for providing fraudulent employment letters to multiple visa applicants. FPU Investigators contacted the company President after noting inconsistencies in cases that the HR Manager had confirmed.

FPU persuaded the company President to press charges and the ARSO-I facilitated her complaint with a local public prosecutor's office. The HR manager was arrested and is on parole as the case is prepared for trial.

d. On November 30, an employee of an auto parts company provided fraudulent job letters to two relatives applying for NIVs. These documents were caught during FPU pre-screening and the applicants admitted the fraud when questioned by investigators. FPU and ARSO-I worked with the owner of the company to press charges against the employee and an arrest warrant was issued. On December 7 the document-broker appeared at the consulate in response to a ruse and was arrested.

e. On December 2, three NIV applicants were arrested for presenting fraudulent job letters, bank statements and other documents. All the applicants obtained these documents from a broker known only as "El Rubio" and paid 35,000 RD (approximately 970 USD) each for the packet. FPU and ARSO-I investigation of phone records enabled identification of "El Rubio" which the applicants confirmed by photo. The ARSO-I then facilitated applicants filing of a complaint, bringing charges against the broker. An arrest warrant has been issued for this previously known, but unidentified document broker. At the same time, his current visa was revoked before he could leave the country.

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f. On November 16 and 24, the Anti-Fraud Department of the National Police (PN) carried out an operation against document vendors and visa-fixers, known locally as "buscones" working in the vicinity of the Consular Section. The PN arrested a total of 13 persons and impounded one mobile bus set up with computers, internet access, photo services, etc. used to facilitate their activities. Ref C details these operations as well as other post efforts against "buscones."

g. All of the fraudulent U.S. visas and passports caught in the last two months were initially reported to the FPU by GODR Immigration. After authorities intercepted the bearers attempting to enter/exit the country they alerted the FPU so that the cases could be investigated quickly allowing for formal arrest and processing.

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GOOD TEAMWORK LEADS TO SUCCESS  
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7) (U) We are fortunate to have an outstanding LES and FSO consular team supporting our fraud prevention efforts. FPU personnel and ARSO-I along with the dedicated PN officer cooperate fully, working together to uncover cases of fraud, investigate document rings and sources of fraud, and pursue arrests and prosecution to the fullest extent possible. The FPU/ARSO-I office's increased cooperation with the National Police, GODR Immigration and local public prosecutors has allowed for the arrest and prosecution of persons involved in consular-related fraud.

Without the relationships established with host government officials, it would be impossible to see such progress. Post will continue to develop strategies to combat fraud and coordinate with local authorities to pursue visa-fixers and document brokers in the Dominican Republic.

LAMBERT  
Lambert